

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Communicable Disease Control

Typhoid Fever

What is typhoid fever?

Typhoid fever is a bacterial infection of the intestinal tract and occasionally the bloodstream. It is an uncommon disease. Most of the cases are acquired during foreign travel to underdeveloped countries. The germ that causes typhoid is a unique human organism *Salmonella typhi*.

Who gets typhoid fever?

Anyone can get typhoid fever but the greatest risk exists to travelers visiting countries where the disease is common. Occasionally, local cases can be traced to exposure to a person who is a chronic carrier.

How is the germ spread?

Typhoid germs are passed in the feces and, to some extent, the urine of infected people. The germs are spread by eating or drinking water or foods contaminated by feces from the infected individual.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms may be mild or severe and may include fever, headache, constipation or diarrhea, rose-colored spots on the trunk and an enlarged spleen and liver. Relapses are common. Fatalities are less than 1 percent with antibiotic treatment.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms generally appear one to three weeks after exposure.

For how long can an infected person carry the typhoid germ?

The carrier stage varies from a number of days to years. Only about 3 percent of cases go on to become lifelong carriers of the germ and this tends to occur more often in adults than in children.

How is typhoid treated?

Specific antibiotics are used to treat cases of typhoid.

Should infected people be isolated?

Most infected people may return to work or school when they have recovered, provided that they carefully wash hands after toilet visits. Children in day care, food handlers, and health care workers need to have health department approval to return to their routines.

Is there a vaccine for typhoid?

A vaccine is available but is generally reserved for people traveling to underdeveloped countries where significant exposure may occur. Strict attention to food and water precautions while traveling to such countries is the most effective preventive method.